THE REFORM BILL.

SPEECH

OF THE

RIGHT HON. W. E. GLADSTONE, M.P.,

CHANCELLOR OF THE EXCHEQUER,

Delivered in the House of Commons, March 12th, 1866.

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THE REFORM BILL.

The CHANCELLOR of the EXCHEQUER: Sir: I have now to ask that the paragraphs in the Queen's Speech which refer to the elective franchise may be read by the clerk at the table.

Sir DENIS LE MARCHANT, the chief clerk, then read the paragraphs as follows:—

"I have directed that information should be procured in reference to the rights of voting in the election of members to serve in Parliament for counties, cities, and boroughs.

"When that information is complete, the attention of Parliament will be called to the result thus obtained, with a view to such improvements in the laws which regulate the rights of voting in the election of members of the House of Commons as may tend to strengthen our free institutions, and conduce to the public welfare".

The CHANCELLOR of the EXCHEQUER rose and said: Mr. Deputy-Speaker, if in order to estimate the difficulties of the question which I have now to bring before you it be right, as I suppose, to take into view not only its own extent and complexity, and the strange fluctuations of circumstances which have attended and marked its history, but also the weakness of the hands into which the treatment of it has fallen—this perhaps I may well say, that few Ministers have risen in recent years to address the House under greater difficulties than at this moment attend my own position and task. Sir, these are difficulties which affect in the first instance her Majesty's Government, and they are perfectly sensible of the weight of responsibility which attaches to them; but although they be concentrated in their greatest weight upon us, yet they are not ours alone. The interest in the solution of this question is an interest common to the whole House of Commons, and to every party and every section of a party that sits within this House. (Hear, hear.) For, sir, let me remind you that these paragraphs which we have just heard read are not the only paragraphs in which, under the most solemn form known to the Constitution, the subject of the representation of the people has been brought under the notice of Parliament. By no less than five Administrations, in no less than six Queen's speeches before the present year, the House of Commons has been acquainted by the Sovereign, as advised by her constitutional Ministers, that the time in their judgment had come when the representation of the people ought to undergo revision. It is needless to refer to the terms of those speeches, but it will

be recollected that they have not been delivered exclusively at periods when one side of the House was in power. (Hear, hear.) In 1860 and in 1859, by both parties, those solemn pledges were given to the country. And, sir, having much, I fear, to state to the House, I shall not unnecessarily occupy their time upon this occasion by discussing the general grounds of the question whether there ought to be a revision of our electoral system, and whether the franchise of the people ought to be extended. With such an accumulation of authority, proceeding from every quarter in its favour, I hold it superfluous for a moment to debate that general question. (Hear, hear.) I shall assume that by those declarations so repeatedly and so earnestly made, a general ground and justification is laid by which her Majesty's Government are warranted in laying before you a proposal relating to this important subject. And, sir, I venture to request of the House, not only for myself, that kind patience and indulgence which I have received at its hands times innumerable, but likewise for the question I have to introduce, that grave and earnest attention that belongs to a matter of this solemn order. Sir, it may be said in respect to the origin of this question, that it was emphatically the work of the House of Commons. Let me remind the House, as the time has long gone by, and as many have taken their seats on these benches now for the first occasion—let me remind the House of what happened in the beginning of the year 1851. The event which then occurred was of a nature to saddle the responsibility connected with the introduction of this question, and that in a peculiar sense, not on one or another Government, but upon the body of the House of Commons. It was an independent member—my hon. friend the member for Surrey (Mr. Locke King)—who on the 20th February, 1851, moved for leave to bring in a bill to grant a 10*l.* occupational franchise in counties. The sole opponent of that motion was my noble friend now at the head of the Government. Every other speaker either approved or was silent on the occasion. (A pause, and laughter from the Opposition.) Every other usual speaker—(hear, hear)—every other authoritative voice, either approved or was silent on the occasion. The Government were beaten by a majority of 21. The minority consisted of 52 members, and among these 52 there were not, I believe, more than some 12 or 15 who sat upon the benches of the party opposite; so that it cannot, I think, be denied that the first initiation of this subject in the form in which it now comes before us—having begun as a question of the county franchise, but it being perfectly well known that that change in the county franchise must draw a change in the borough along with it, was the first initiation of this question—I say, was in a peculiar sense the work of the House of Commons. And therefore, in inviting you to co-operate with us, who are the advisers of the Crown, in bringing this question to a solution, we are inviting you not merely to relieve us from difficulties, but to work out a work which is a common interest to yourselves. (Hear, hear.)

The election of a new Parliament has naturally made the Government to feel that the time has arrived when it is right that the sense of the representatives of the people should again be taken in reference to the laws which regulate our elections. Sir, the duty of the Government was a very

plain one. No doubt they had before them the warnings of former failures. No doubt they had to deal, as was obvious, with a state of the public mind not clear. definite, and resolute, but rather bewildered or indecisive. Their duty, however, was plain ; it was to examine the materials of the case ; to cast aside every consideration narrower than those which belong to a great public and national interest ; not to enquire what might be for the benefit or the injury of this party or that ; to be more studious of the general interests than of that of their own fame or their own constituents ; to apply their minds and the best of their abilities to the formation of a prudent and effective measure ; and then to commit it to the hands of Parliament ; but so far as depended upon them, having framed that measure, to sustain and support it with all their energies. (Hear, hear.) And the first question we had to consider was a most important question; it was whether we were to attempt legislation in the present session, or to be content with inquiry. It was beyond all dispute that a careful examination of the facts of the case lay at the very threshold of the subject. It was want of information, or want of definite and authentic information, which formed the greatest matter of objection during the debates of the year 1860. It was scarcely possible in that year to get at the point really in issue ; such were the doubts, such the misgivings, and such the scepticism in regard to the figures on one side and on the other. We felt that if we were really to come to an issue on the merits of the case, we must endeavour to make ourselves, and to make Parliament as well as ourselves, masters of the facts which belong to it. (Hear, hear.) Well, sir, with no delay, I believe, in the first Cabinet after the funeral of our lamented friend (Lord Palmerston), but certainly before approaching any other domestic question of public concernment, we applied ourselves to consider and form a measure, and to collect the information on which it should be founded. As soon as the resolution had been formed, the necessary measures were taken for the purpose, and I am bound to say that the assistance we received from the Poor-law Department, and in particular the labours of Mr Lambert, who was the person principally concerned, were, in point of ability and assiduity, everything we could desire. (Hear, hear.) I think that members, whether they sit on this side or on the other, who have had time since Saturday to institute any examination of the volume which has been laid on the table, will admit that in the collection of its contents time has not been misspent, and that they have the advantage of approaching the consideration of this subject with such a mass of facts as has never before been available for their guidance. (Hear, hear.) We therefore can truly say that no time has been lost. Had we felt that it was impossible, with the means at the command of the Executive Government, to obtain information which should be ample in its scope and range, and authentic and trustworthy in its character, we should have had no difficulty in at once making known the fact to Parliament, and in postponing the bill until such information had been obtained. But when we saw what could be done, when the materials began to grow under our hands, we had no doubt whatever of being able to satisfy both Houses of the Legislature as to the sufficiency of the knowledge on which we should call them to act, and therefore we had no hesitation in

pledging ourselves at the commencement of the session to the introduction of a measure of Reform. (Hear, hear.)

I have been anxious to explain how it is that the time for bringing in these papers has been deferred, not merely for the reason—comparatively one of secondary importance—that there have been here and there not unnatural indications of a disposition to murmur at the delay in the production of those papers, and to ascribe it to hesitation and vacillation of purpose on the part of the Government. Undoubtedly this has not been the case. So anxious have we been to give the House of Commons, so far as we could, the same means of judgment with ourselves, that I can truly state that on Friday evening I could not obtain for my own use a complete and finished copy of these papers, except the copy laid upon the table of the House of Commons, and which therefore passed out of my hands. But the question of time has an importance very different from that which it derives from its connection with vague rumours and vague imputations. It has this importance, that it is now the 12th of March when I make to you the first proposal, and considering the Easter recess is just at hand, it would not be possible for us to ask you to read the bill a second time until the second week in April. Therefore, we, as prudent and practical men, had to measure what our power might be with regard to legislation in the present session. Of course the question arose for consideration—Are we to have what is termed a complete measure, or are we to have one that is incomplete? Well, now, I would ask members of the House to consider what is meant by a complete revision of our representative system, and I must omit from the idea or the definition of a complete revision, or from the explanation of it, some branches of legislation which are favourites, or have been favourites, with a portion of the members of this House, but which we, as the Government responsible at this present moment, do not think to be necessary in the present bill. I do not, therefore, refer to such questions as the question of secret voting, or the question of the shortening of Parliaments—(hear, hear)—but to what would be generally admitted as belonging to a complete revision of the representative system, and to the immense advantage which would attend an operation whereby we should be able to deal with the whole range of the question at one time. (Cheers.) In the first place there must be a consideration—an urgent consideration—of the franchises in England and Wales. There must be, perhaps more urgently, required a consideration of the franchises in Scotland. The subject of the Irish franchise, too, must be considered, although that is in a simple state, because the nature of the present electoral arrangement in that country is much more perfect, as far as regards the machinery of elections, than it is in this country.

Then comes, not the question, but the whole group of questions that are included in the common phrase of redistribution of seats—(cheers)—questions between the three kingdoms, questions between town and country, questions between the total extinction of capital punishment such as is inflicted in schedule A, and that milder method of amputation such as is administered in schedule B; or, above all, that method which was adopted by my noble friend at the head of the Government in 1852. I mean the

grouping of bills together, or the grouping of towns together. All these are matters which must undergo careful consideration. Then comes the question that can never be evaded, namely, the consideration whether in all cases the present boundaries of boroughs are such as the circumstances of those boroughs would naturally command. I am sorry to say there is another matter belonging to the review which I do not believe to be less urgent at the present time—that is, to consider the state of the law with respect to corrupt practices at elections. (Hear, hear.) Do not let it be understood that I make any promises on the subject. It is as difficult to promise as it is to legislate; but I am afraid the urgency of such a consideration is in no degree lessened if no notice be taken of it in the present scheme, but undoubtedly it could not be passed by by any Government attempting a complete revision. Then, lastly, there is the important question, no doubt of a less arduous order, but still material question, of the machinery connected with the mode of elections. These subjects, great and complex in themselves, have been further complicated by the speculations of many men of great ability and great authority, who have thought that the time was come when, taking upon one side the demands for an extension of the franchise, and on the other side the difficulties we have to encounter with respect to a redistribution of the power among the different classes of the community—that the time was come for introducing, in one form or another, propositions of which I do not undervalue the importance — questions which may be separated by arguments most ingenious, and by authority most weighty, ; but yet propositions, of all of which it may be emphatically said they are, in the old English sense, innovations, and which, as being innovations. never could command the view and perusal of this House without a careful, searching, and jealous examination. Now, was it possible for us to suppose that, as we now stand, Parliament would give itself to the complete review of that which I have endeavoured faintly to describe? Was it possible to suppose that Parliament would be able to pass a measure of such an extensive character this present session? It is a constitutional practice in this country to entertain a high idea of what we call the omnipotence of Parliament; but time and space, you know, cannot be annihilated even to make lovers happy—(laughter)—much less to insure legislative purposes. I want to know, considering the position in which we now stand, what is the true requisite for dealing with a subject so extensive. I think, as far as we can reckon, if we obtain leave from the House for the introduction of this bill, we shall propose the second reading of the bill on the 12th April; and suppose I measure the time between the 12th April and the middle of July, which I think would be the latest period at which such a bill could be sent to the House of Lords, I find the Government nights amount to about twenty-four. One-half of those at least must necessarily be occupied by the financial business of the session and the business of supply, and beyond that we should have nothing whatever to depend upon but the charity of private members, and the crumbs that fall from their tables. (Laughter.)

What have we found in former years? In 1860 we spent, I may say, whole nights in trying to do nothing; but there is one example—the great

example of the Reform Act—which may give us some idea of the time occupied by complete reviews of our electoral system. One single bill of the three bills out of which the final Reform Act grew, occupied in one of its three forms fifty nights of the House of Commons. (Laughter and cheers.) I greatly understate the case if I say 100 nights were requisite for the complete review of the electoral system which was achieved in 1831-2. It may be said, and said very truly, that at that time that there was a political heat of excitement—a political degree of apprehension which does not now exist. And I do not suppose that any such review as I have indicated would at the present day require so great a time ; but let me point out that the time occupied in passing that Act and accompanying Acts was not less than six or eight times in extent that which is now, upon a sanguine estimate, at our command. You did then completely review your electoral system; but in order to do it you turned day into night, summer into winter; you called upon every man of every class to sacrifice to his domestic arrangements; you made the seasons give way to your resolute and determined will. But you sacrificed besides, and justly sacrificed—but you were compelled to sacrifice all legislation requiring deep and serious discussion for two years. These are not the circumstances in which we now stand. We must now reckon, I have no doubt, upon very fair and indulgent treatment with respect to the progress of a question of this kind. Do not let it be supposed that I am apprehensive of what is called obstruction. We have, therefore, determined that it is quite impossible for us to do more than to approach this question; looking at first at what we might think came first in the natural order of importance, and not doubting for one moment that that which stands first is that which relates to the enfranchisement of large masses of our fellow-countrymen now excluded from the electoral franchise, but qualified as I believe to use it. And do not let me be taunted with using the word masses—I will substitute for that word large numbers of our fellow-countrymen. This was the first and most legitimate claim, and it would be ridiculous for us, under the notion of presenting a complete measure, to lay upon the table a bill omitting to include them. The production of such a bill would ask the judgment of Parliament upon it, and it would not in fact be a step towards our end; but it would be a measure the most certain of all others to meet with disaster and discredit. We therefore determined to confine the bill we had under consideration to the enfranchisement, and we founded that determination upon a consideration of the circumstances and the time at which we stand, and the amount of opportunity at our command.

Perhaps, however, it may be asked—and I think the demand would be a fair one—what view we take of another subject. A question from an hon. baronet opposite has already no doubt given me an intimation that so far as the Scotch franchise is concerned we must not deal with this question in England without being prepared also to deal with the Scotch franchise. Well, what we think is this: That a complete review of the representation must include all or most of the important subjects that I have named. We admit that the present plan is incomplete. It will be asked: Will you complete it? I have ever been averse—and I think it is an aversion justified

by general observation and experience—to dealing in pledges for future sessions. Such is the number and variety of circumstances which must affect the position and duties of the Government of an empire like this at future periods that, in my opinion, we must look to the future itself to determine and prepare an opportunity for dealing with these important subjects. But I may freely say, that while I am convinced that the group of questions included in the complex idea of Parliamentary Reform is beyond the handling of one session, and is especially beyond the handling of what remains of the present session; yet I think that there cannot be the smallest doubt that if the Government find it their duty to take these subjects in hand, we at least are fully convinced that the present Parliament is perfectly competent to decide. (Cheers.) Having arrived at the conclusion that we ought to deal with the question of Parliamentary representation, it was equally obvious to us that if we did not revive the bill for which we were responsible as a Government, in great part composed of the same individuals as composed the Government of 1860, we ought at least to consider that bill our natural starting-point. And I will take first the question of the county representation—a question happily beset with much less, I won't say of intrinsic difficulty—for I do not believe that apart from jealousies, the intrinsic difficulties need be great—but beset with much less jealousy, much less apprehension than the question of representation in the boroughs. In 1860 a proposal was made to adopt the bill of my hon. friend the member for East Surrey, and to reduce the occupation franchise in counties from 50*l.* to 10*l.* That proposal was not attended, if I remember right, with any other proposal touching the county representation. What we now propose is a modification of that plan of my hon. friend. We propose to reduce the occupation franchise—but my statement is not precisely accurate when I say reduce, though it is perhaps accurate enough for the general understanding—from 50*l.* to 14*l.* ("Oh, oh," and a laugh.) We leave the 50*l.* franchise precisely as it stands. The occupation franchise which we propose between 50*l.* of value and 14*l.* of value will be an occupation franchise, not of land alone, but of a house, or of a house with land. (Hear, hear.)

And there is no great difficulty in estimating from the papers which have been laid upon the table the amount of enfranchisement which this change of the law will produce. It would correspond as nearly as possible with the effect of a 12*l.* rating franchise. And if hon. gentlemen will look at the figures furnished by that volume of statistics with respect to a 12*l.* rating franchise, they will find, I think, that its effect, after making a proper deduction for those who do not claim for themselves to have occupied a sufficient time, would be to add to the present number of county voters about 171,000 persons. Now, it may be asked why we do not go down to the limit of 10*l.* I certainly cannot say that there would be any danger in going down to 10*l.*, so far as I am able to judge, but upon the whole we think that by the change which is now recommended we shall obtain not only a very large but likewise a very independent addition to the county constituencies. (Cheers.) At least we believe this, that by going from 14*l.* to 10*l.* we should, perhaps, render it not more but less independent. We do not anticipate the existence of jealousy or

apprehension with regard to this considerable enfranchisement, because I think it will be allowed on all hands—I certainly entertain that opinion strongly—that it must be viewed entirely as a middle-class enfranchisement. The number of persons properly belonging to the working classes, and having a 14*l.* franchise, will be very small, and, indeed, not worth taking into account. We have looked, however, further into this matter, to see whether, under the present law, there were interests of a more strictly proprietary character—interests connected with tenure, and properly belonging to the county franchise—which were not at present provided for; and we find this to be the state of the law with regard to the county franchise derived from property within the limits of boroughs—and when I say boroughs I include cities—that a man possessed of a 40s. freehold within a borough may vote at the county election; but that if he has a copyhold, which is a rare case, or if he has a leasehold, which is a common case, and which is just as truly a proprietary interest as a 40s. freehold, and in many cases is fifteen times more valuable than that freehold, he is not entitled to a vote for it in the county. We propose, therefore, by a clause to extend to the possessors of copyhold and leaseholders within the limits of boroughs, and subject exactly to the same terms which now give the right of voting beyond those limits, the same power which they would have if they were freeholders within the limits of boroughs of voting at the county election. (Hear, hear.) I am not able to estimate the numerical effect of this enlargement of the franchise. It would not be possible, I think, to obtain materials for that purpose. It would not be a large mass, and I think it would be good so far as it goes, because it is a kind of representation which is germane and natural to the purposes of a county constituency.

I now come to another topic, which is the only other topic that I need mention affecting the counties, and which I introduce at this point because it is at this point that it will have to perform a principal part in our proposal I allude to those franchises, new to the Constitution, other than the franchise of tenure and the franchise of occupation, which have sometimes been called by an irreverent name, but which may properly be called special franchises. A number of those franchises were proposed by the Ministry of Lord Aberdeen in the bill of 1854, and I think they were extended in the bill of 1859. So far as the bill of 1854 is concerned, many of us are responsible for it. But we have considered very carefully the nature of those franchises, and we have arrived at this conclusion—that they are clearly not suitable to intoduce as a general basis for an extension of the electoral franchise. And therefore the effect of our review, I do not hesitate to say, has been unfavourable to the introduction of these special or bye franchises; but there is one of them in respect to which, although not attaching to it any prominent importance, yet, notwithstanding, we think that there are sufficient grounds for representing it to the favourable consideration of the House. I mean that which is called the savings bank franchise. (Hear, hear.) It has these advantages: First of all, as far as it goes, it meets a feeling which is prevalent in the country, and to which we are willing to give way as far as we can without the sacrifice of more

important ends and aims—a feeling that it is desirable to include within the constituent body, by the method of what I may call spontaneous selection, men who could not be included by any other method of franchise you could adopt founded upon the old principles of occupation or tenure. (Hear, hear.) Certainly it must be true—it is beyond all reasonable doubt or question, although the nature of savings banks does not allow us to offer you any demonstrations of it—that provident habits enable many persons—many in early youth—many in very humble circumstances, many not having any independent holding—to amass these little stores by the time they come to legal age, and thereby, as we think, to qualify themselves, and justly qualify themselves, for taking part in the choice of those who are to govern the country—(hear, hear,)—and above all, the savings bank franchise has this notable advantage, that it is attended with no complication of title whatever. Every savings bank depositor possesses, and it is necessary that he should possess, a book in which is inserted every payment in which he has made, and every payment out which he has received, and the date of each and all of these payments; so that an inspection, which never could take up a minute of time, would tell you when you had fixed your standard whether a man is entitled or not to vote by the savings bank franchise. We therefore propose that all adult males who have been depositors in a savings bank, or post office savings bank, for over two years, shall be entitled to vote for the place where they reside. The place where they reside will usually be found to be outside the limits of a town. Of course I do not mean because there will not be any such depositors in the towns, and because the nature of the franchise would be such as to admit the great bulk of them. But a great many of such depositors out of the limits of the towns will be found to be below the limits of the 14*l.* holding, and it is on that account that I mention the savings bank franchise in this connection. Now, with regard to the two years, let me say that we do not follow the precise example of 1859, but it is obviously necessary to interpose a period in order to prevent this franchise from becoming a means of corruption. (Hear, hear.)

As respects the number of persons whom this provision will admit to the franchise, if we look at the return with regard to the savings banks, which was presented a few days ago, we see very magnificient totals, first of all of depositors of all classes, and secondly even of adult male depositors, and of adult male depositors of 50*l.* and upwards. I think those of 50*l.* and upwards for one year in England and Wales amount to no less than 94,000; and those for two years to 87,000. But when we come to consider two most powerful causes, we shall find that we must not reckon upon large enfranchisements from this source. The first is that so large a proportion of these persons will be enfranchised by other titles and claims; but the second is the immense deduction that you must make from the apparent effect of every provision for the extension of the franchise, when it is accompanied, as it is of necessity in this case, with the condition that the possession of the franchise must be attended with the trouble of an annual claim, which is in this case inevitable. The money might be withdrawn, and the qualification would be gone. We cannot relieve the man of his trouble by means of a public officer. The claim must be made and renewed

from year to year. Therefore, although we consider this to be a good franchise, we offer it solely as a collateral and subsidiary franchise. If it adds some 10,000 or 15,000 to the constituency I believe that will be the utmost that we can expect. But, at any rate, it is a very good franchise, as far as it goes, and moreover we hope, under the operation of the Post Office Savings Bank, it will be a franchise having a tendency gradually to extend itself. That, I think, completes what I have to say upon the subject of the county franchise. The enfranchisement in counties will, according to the plan of Government, be, in our view, a middle class enfranchisement. Its effect will be not to increase the share of the working classes in the representation, but, on the contrary, to diminish it relatively, because the influence of the working classes as represented by the class of small freeholders will be proportionately diminished.

Mr. BRIGHT: What will be the proportion? How much for the house, and how much for the land?

The CHANCELLOR of the EXCHEQUER: If the house is inhabited by the voter there is no stipulation. If it is not inhabited by him it must be 7*l.* at least, being half the annual value. (Hear, hear.) Now I come to the more vexed question of the inhabitants of boroughs. I think it will contribute to clearness, which I am desirous above all to study, if I first call the attention of the House to the fact that the inhabitants of towns to be dealt with for the purpose of enfranchisement are as such to be dealt with in four distinct classes. One of these is the class, and this is the principal one, of those men who inhabit a separate house, or other separately rated building, and who pay their own rates. These are the proper objects of the Reform Act of 1832 with respect to the borough franchise; and these I should call ratepaying householders. The next are the class of persons who inhabit their own houses, whose houses are separately rated, but who do not pay their own rates, they being paid either under Mr. Sturges Bourne's Act, or under the Small Tenements Rating Act, or under particular local Acts that prevail in certain towns and districts, the rates being paid by the landlord. These persons, and these alone, I shall designate by the phrase by which they are best known—I don't know that it is a very accurate phrase, either in law or fact—meaning that of "compound householders." The third is one who have now in law a claim to enfranchisement, but whose claim is totally null and valuless. These are persons not only who do not pay their own rates but whose holdings are not separately rated; that is to say, they are the inhabitants of a portion of a house—it may be, and indeed it is always, so far as I deal with them in this, a separate part of the house; but not separately rated, and they pay their rents without any reference to rates whatever. Now, the two first classes I have mentioned we think to be properly householders. There has been a tendency in legal decisions to introduce as householders, or at any rate under the effect of the t tle of householders—that is, to consider as qualified to vote—those who are not householders; for I doubt very much whether, excepting the very few nstances where large buildings, such as those in Victoria-street, that are ivided into separate holdings of a very superior character, so that there an be no question as to the value—I doubt whether this class can be said

to be on the list of voters or on the registers of the country at all. And this class of persons, inasmuch as they are not separately rated, we think it much better to deal with as lodgers. The only mode in which under the present law they could become enfranchised would be by getting a separate rating of their holdings. They are chiefly to be found in London—the enormous majority—though there are some in other places. Nothing, I think, could be more inconvenient than to have an electoral law which compels parishes to adopt rating arrangements which are not good for rating, but which are arbitarily made necessary for the purpose of the franchise. We think it better, as far we can, to let things take their ordinary course. Substantially these persons stand in the position of lodgers, and we propose to deal with them accordingly. The fourth class is the class of lodgers properly so called, that is to say, those who hold and inhabit their rooms as their own, but as inmates of the house of another man. If the House will bear in mind these four classes it will conduce to clearness in the rest of this somewhat tangled discussion.

Now we approach a question upon which it would be idle to disguise that so much indecision, so much jealousy, so much apprehension exists—the question of the town franchise. And wishing, as far as depends upon us, to remove all that indecision, to allay all that jealousy, and to banish all that suspicion, we think that can best be done by a full *expose* of the facts of the case. We therefore asked ourselves what was the state of the town constituency in 1832, and what had been its progress since. The town constituency in the year 1832, the first year of the Reform Act, amounted to 282,000 persons ; of whom 63,000 in round numbers were freemen, 44,000 were scot and lot voters, or voters of a similar description, and 144,000 were 10*l.* householders. Since that period the freemen have fallen in numbers to 42,000; the old-right voters to 9,000, being, as I may say, on their way to extinction—(hear, hear)—while the 10*l.* householders have risen to 463,000. The gross total of the constituencies, therefore, is 514,000 ; that shows an increase since 1832 of 82 per cent. In the same period the population of towns had increased as follows: in 1831 it was 5,250,000; in 1865 it was 9,336,000, being an increase of 4,119,000, or 79 per cent.—(hear, hear)—so that the growth of the constituencies in towns, notwithstanding the vast augmentation of the wealth of the country, has practically but just exceeded the bare growth of the population. (Hear, hear.) Now that is an important fact for the House to bear in mind. In counties the case was different. There the growth of the constituency has been quite as great, and the growth of the population much less. Now we come to a point of very great importance, and I think the House will be of opinion that the three or four months which have been spent upon the collection of the returns would not have been ill spent if they had led to no other result than to the particulars contained in the Blue-book of Friday with respect to the representation of the working classes in the present constituencies. (Hear, hear.) The figures as they stand came out thus: I mentioned, I think, 514,000 as the town constituencies; but great pains have been taken in striking out in every case the double entries; and I have no doubt that upon the whole they have been struck out with considerable precision.

The net amount of the town constituencies—the actual number of person entitled now to vote—is 489,000. I shall for the convenience of the House confine myself to thousands. The 10*l.* voters of the working classes are returned as 108,000, and the freemen and old-right voters of the working classes as 20,000, making a total of 128,000, and showing an apparent per-centage of 26 of the present constituencies as belonging to the working classes. Well, now, sir, there will be, I have no doubt, some dispute upon the soundness of our definition of the working men, and I am bound to say that our definition is a large definition. (Hear, hear.) I believe, however, it to be the best definition that can be found. I do not believe the term admits of accurate definition, but the only one that we found we could take was undoubtedly a liberal definition. But you may possibly say the 10 per cent. or 20 per cent. of the persons here included as of the working class are so considerably interested in shopkeeping, through their wives and children, that they ought not really to stand as working men. No doubt there is a certain amount of debateable ground of that kind, and I only think it right to notice it in order that we may have a clear understanding of the case as it really stands. But suppose we were to deduct 20 per cent. upon that account, the result of these remarkable figures would be that at least 21 per cent., or at most 26 per cent., of the present constituencies may be considered as belonging to the working classes. (Hear, hear.) And so far I freely own that is a larger per-centage than I expected to find. (Opposition cheers.) But I am extremely glad of it, and I only wish it had been larger still. (Cries of "Hear, hear.")

But, sir, I must observe upon this infusion of the working classes in the present constituencies, that in the first place it is exceedingly unequal. (Hear, hear.) I have gone roughly over the two hundred boroughs, and I think I gathered together about sixty boroughs in which the proportion that the working classes possessed of the franchise, taken upon the whole of of those sixty, was not less than one–third. I gathered thirty other boroughs, probably boroughs of greater importance, and in those thirty boroughs I found the proportion of the working classes was not more than one-tenth. (Hear, hear.). And this distribution of the working classes is not only unequal, but I must say myself, as rather of a northerner, that it is least where it ought to be the largest—I mean the towns in the north. (Hear, hear.) I will give you six towns as examples. In Oldham, with a constituency of 2,265, the working classes are 315, or one in eight. In Halifax, with a constituency of 1,771, the working classes are 171, or one in ten. In Stockport, with a constituency of 1,348, the working classes are 124, or one in eleven. In Bradford, with a constituency of 5,189, the working classes are 438, or one in twelve. In Leeds, with a constituency 7,217, the working classes are 523, or one in fourteen. And last of all there is a town that deserves special mention, not only on account of the distinguished man by whom it was but twelve months ago represented, but for other reasons—I mean the town of Rochdale, which probably has done more than any other town in making good to practical minds a case for some enfranchisement of the working classes—(hear, hear); because it is the town where that remarkable system, and at first sight I do not hesitate to say that most

critical and perilous system obtained, of ousting the retail trader, and the working class taking into its own hands the business of its own supply, and where through the extraordinary intelligence and self-acting power of these men, that system has been successfully assumed and made a source of the greatest comfort, and at the same time profit to themselves. (Hear, hear.) What is the case? Rochdale, with a constituency of 1,358, shows an enfranchisement of the working classes 68, or one in twenty. (Hear, hear.) If, then, the proportion of the working classes to the whole constituencies is more satisfactory than we might have supposed, on the other hand, I must say its distribution is not less unsatisfactory. (Hear, hear.) The case of Rochdale is peculiar. It so happens that a district which naturally would belong to it is not included in it, and that illustrates the necessity of including some consideration of the present state of boundaries in any complete view of the system of representation.

Well, now, we are in very good humour with ourselves, because we find we have 26 per cent. or 21 per cent. of the working classes included in the borough constituencies. How was it in 1832? I have endeavoured to make the best estimate in my power, and I apprehend there cannot be the smallest doubt of these propositions—first of all, that the enfranchisement of the working classes, as it stood in 1832, was not an excessive enfranchisement; and, secondly, that the advance of the working classes since 1832 in everything that can entitle men to some share in the government of their country has been a great and an undeniable advance. It is not denied on any hand, whether we take the education in schools—whether we take conduct or obedience to the laws—whether we take self-command and power of endurance shown under difficulty and privation—(hear, hear)—whether we take avidity for knowledge and self-improvement—applying any one of these tests, there can be no doubt that if the working man was in some degree fit to share in political privileges in 1832, he has at any rate attained some additional fitness now. (Hear, hear.) In 1832 there were 63,000 freemen, and I take the proportion of them, belonging to the working classes, at 54 per cent., or 34,000 freemen. Then there were the scot and lot and potwalloping voters. I have taken only 60 per cent. of these voters as belonging to the working classes. In my opinion that is a very moderate estimate. (Hear, hear.) That gives us 27,000 voters of the working classes under this head in 1832. I next come to 10*l.* occupiers in 1832; and as the 10*l.* occupiers at present, according to the figures we are now using, show 26 per cent., so using the same definition for the purpose of comparison, I assume them in 1832 to have been only 15 per cent.,—that is to say, 26,000. Adding these figures together, I come to this result, that the total constituencies in 1832 were 283,000, and that of these 87,000 were of the working classes—that is to say, in 1832 they were 31 per cent. of the whole, and they are now but 26 per cent. (Cheers.) It is not satisfactory on all points to deal with this question as a matter of pure statistics; but this I must say, that if statistics prove anything, I think the figures I have quoted prove that the proportion of the working classes, which ought to have been an increasing and growing, has been on the contrary a diminishing proportion, and consequently, that the time has

arrived when it would be right to do something to increase the proportion. (Hear, hear.) Now, may I address one word to gentlemen opposite? There is no wile—there is no stratagem which can lay hidden under it. It is the simplest thing in the world. Let them take the distribution of the working-class voters in different parts of the constituencies, and they will derive immense consolation from it. Let them observe the effect of this working-class element upon the condition of political parties, for it is not denied that there is on the opposite side a not unnatural, but still a very considerable apprehension of the effect of a wide enfranchisement, or of any new enfranchisement of the working classes in respect to a diminution of those parliamentary influences which most naturally and justly these gentlemen regard as most essential for the well-being of the State.

I will take a case, the political character of which might be called celebrated on the one side and notorious on the other—I mean the metropolitan boroughs. How stands the proportion of the working classes in the metropolitan boroughs as compared with the rest of the country? England without the metropolitan boroughs has in its town constituency 27 per cent. of the working classes. England with the metropolitan boroughs has only 23 per cent of the working classes. Yet I apprehend that it is undoubted that if there be one section of the members of this House, under which steadily, constantly, and almost uniformly, Liberalism alone—and somewhat advanced Liberalism too—(a laugh)—and sometimes philosophic Liberalism —(hear, hear)—has progressed, it has been the case in the metropolitan boroughs. The metropolitan boroughs, with the smallest proportion of the working classes in their constituency, have been less conservative in the representatives which they have sent to this House, and I administer this as my small contribution to the other side of the House upon the subject of their fear for the admission of the working classes. I have stated that the Government in approaching the consideration of this question naturally took for counties the bill of 1860 as their starting point. I may be asked, "Did you take the bill of 1860 as it stood for towns?" In answering that question I must call the attention of the House to what happened in the discussion on this subject. Although I said we then spent ten nights in doing nothing, yet undoubtedly those discussions developed—along with, I think, a good deal of irrelevant reference to the institutions of other countries, and a great deal of unfounded apprehension as to our own—the defect in the arrangement of our bill, and I do not think that if we had been permitted to go into committee with the bill of 1860 we could have held it exactly as it was. Not because in our view of the case the bill admitted too many persons: for what was our view of the case? My noble friend at the head of the Government, in introducing the bill on the 1st of March, computed that the effect of it would be to enfranchise 194,000 persons in boroughs, but that was in our belief an outside estimate, and during the time the bill was before the House we saw reason to retract that statement. Sir George C. Lewis, than whom no man could be a more acute or impartial judge, on the 23rd of April stated that by the bill only 160,000 persons would be enfranchised in boroughs. The hon. member for Birmingham had taken the number at about the same—namely, from

160,000 to 170,000. I do not think that any one will say that was either an unreasonable or too large an extension; but it was an enfranchisement bill distributed and imperfectly adjusted.

What appeared in the course of those discussions was this. First of all, let the House bear in mind that the metropolis constitutes in itself, as measured by the population, and by the number of human hearts and minds within it, one-third of the whole town population of the country, and undoubtedly, I think, it will be owned against us that the proportion of that bill would have been highly unequal as between the metropolis and the towns of the provinces. Very large numbers would have been enfranchised in very many considerable towns, but at the same time we should have done that, it was shown to us that in London, under the present law, there are numbers of persons who are excluded from the franchise though the law entitles them to hold it. I mean particularly compound householders, who cannot be taken in London at being less than near 40,000 persons. By this bill of of 1860 these persons were virtually passed over, and it was quite an insignificant franchise, the descent from 10*l.* to 6*l.*, as the value of land and the rent of houses in London is so high. Therefore, so far as regards London, the bill of 1860 was almost no bill at all. Yet my noble friend had proposed his measure on a double basis. It was quite true that it was a 6*l.* rental franchise; but it was also a bill for enfranchising from 160,000 to 200,000 men. But there was raised against that estimate another estimate. The then member for Marylebone, in an able speech, estimated that the 6*l.* rental would enfranchise 400,000, but a committee of the House of Lords, by a majority of its members, adopted a statement that it would enfranchise 300,000. We, however, did not admit that. We held to our own number, and we said that our proposal was first to enfranchise 160,000 to 200,000 of the working classes. And then it was also a proposal for a 6*l.* rental. But when we came to the committee it would have been shown that it was impossible to keep the two. One of the propositions would have had to be given up. It was a plan that must have admitted a very large number of persons who are entitled to the franchise, but I believe that the consequence would have been that, not wishing to change very greatly the relations of class and class, when we got into committee we should have been compelled to make an alteration in the 6*l.* rental franchise. The best proof of that is to be found in a statement of my noble friend (Earl Russell) which was made towards the close of the discussion, and after the debates in the House of Commons had exhibited the imperfect construction of the provisions of that bill. On the 4th June, 1860, Lord Russell said—

"This I will say, that if you will propose any of the measures mentioned in the course of these debates—that is, either for raising the franchise by making it a rating instead of a rental franchise, or by increasing the amount of rental, or in another way, by admitting a great number of voters distinguished by property, or by a high degree of knowledge, and professedly belonging to the working classes—any proposals of the kind shall be fairly considered by us in committee. We certainly shall not declare ourselves so completely wedded to the franchise put forward that we will not submit to treat on the subject if in committee such a proposal should be made, and if

the House should prefer it to that of ourselves it will be our duty to see if the bill with such an alteration would, as a political measure, tend to extend the franchise and benefit the institutions of the country ; and if it would, we should be ready to adopt such alteration."

It was in our view essential, as was declared by a motion carried in this House in 1859, that any measure of enfranchisement in towns must be an enfranchisement downwards. But now the facts were brought before us to prove that by some of the provisions of the present law large numbers of persons—householders paying the rent that had been declared by law to be a sufficient presumptive qualification—were not in possession of the franchise. We found it impossible to overlook every claim. We found it our first duty to inquire who would be enfranchised above the line of 10*l.* as being in the spirit of the law entitled to a vote And then as to the enfranchisement downwards. The first question then was to ask, what were those defects in the law ? They are two. One I have glanced at, and I will now explain the other. By the present law a man fulfilling the various other conditions with respect to time and occupation and residence, and being rated, cannot be brought upon the register unless he has paid the Queen's taxes and local rates made since a certain date, and to be paid by a certain date This was a class commonly called the ratepaying class. They did not call it the ratepaying and taxing class, but as far as the Queen's taxes are concerned I think the local authorities have been extremely considerate, and have not created great trouble. But as far as the ratepaying class, or a portion of this class, that was a very practical difficulty ; and great annoyance has been occasioned in many cases. In some places it has been supposed that the local officers, under the influence of particular bias, did not apply for the payment of the rate until the date had passed when the payment of it would avail with a view to the exercise of the franchise. The rates of the two parties of voters are paid by the political agents in the interest of the respective candidates, and one local gentleman, who very kindly sent up this information, as far as his own place was concerned, hoped that the communication would be considered confidential. ("Hear, hear," and laughter.)

There are certain boroughs where, by common consent, the law is overlooked on both sides. Now we propose to do away with this clause altogether. (Hear, hear.) In Liverpool I do not overstate the case when I say that there are not less than between 6,000 and 7,000 persons, probably more, whose rates are habitually and ordinarily collected from the landlord by arrangement with the parish officers, and are therefore disfranchised without any neglect of their own. They are not compound householders, but their rates are collected from the landlord. We expect that the victims of this class are almost all of them persons who belong to the designation of working men. It will admit not less than 25,000 above the line of 10*l.* by the abolition of this clause. Then we come to the question of compound householders. The principle upon which we go is that they should be treated exactly as ratepaying householders, if the rent of their house is of such a scale that in the judgment of the Legislature they are suitable persons to be enfranchised. It is perfectly certain as an economic truth that

the rates of that house, though paid in the first instance by the landlord, are ultimately paid by the householder, and it can make no difference to us, and does not justify any line of distinction being drawn between the two. At present the law is defective in this respect, that the name of the compound householder does not commonly appear on the rate book for the purpose of rating. In the amendment of the law of rating which we shall have to propose, we shall provide that the name of the holder of the house, as well as any rating held in the house, shall appear upon the rate book from whence, just like the rate of the householder, it will pass to the list of voters without imposing the burden or trouble upon the householder himself. Being upon the list of voters it will be subject to the scrutiny of the revising barrister, just as if it were the name of the ratepaying voter, and it will remain and stand upon the register as such. Therefore an effective enfranchisement will be given to the compound householders, whereas up to the present time this enfranchisement has been almost purely speculative, and there was a want of executive means to remedy it. In the metropolis, we may say without fear of contradiction that it is not done in one case in fifty, and when it is done it is for some particular purpose. The election agent finds out the names and puts them on the list. Now that is a way in which it ought not to be done. Let it be understood that if our proposal be adopted the householder of a compound house will be put upon the list without any claim. He will get there by a spontaneous process. Then comes the third of the classes to which I formerly alluded—that class which is also very numerous in the metropolis—the occupiers of flats or portions of houses not under separate landlords, and not the subject of separate rating. As to these, we can do nothing but leave them as they are. If they can show that the portion of the tenement inhabited by them is of the clear annual value of 10*l.*, and if they get themselves rated, as I believe they are entitled to ask, though legal difficulties of this kind form an almost insuperable obstacle, they may by a circuitous process get themselves placed on the list of voters. Of course, if there were no trouble and uncertainty as to the rating that would get rid of the difficulty, but the public officer does not know, and cannot know, who these people are. He knows the value of the annual rating of compound householders, because that is necessary for public purposes ; but he does not and cannot know the rent paid to the householder by the man who is the occupier of part of the tenement. Consequently we must leave these persons as they are now, subject to the burden of yearly claims. If the party can show that the tenement he rents is of the clear annual value of 10*l.*, though relieved from the necessity of being rated, he may have his name placed on the register, but with the necessity of renewing his claim from year to year. The number of the compound householders will be, as nearly as we can estimate, 35,000 persons, nearly the whole of whom are resident in the metropolis, and I think our estimate pretty correct, because we have in numerous parishes ascertained the numbers of instances in which rates are paid by the landlord or by different occupiers.

I have now stated to the House the numbers of the additions to the constituency which we calculate will be made by our proposals—28,000 by the abolition of the rate-paying clauses, and 35,000 by the new provisions

of the law in regard to compound householders. I have spoken of that class sometimes I believe called holders of tenements, whom we propose to treat as lodgers, and I now come to the interesting question commonly called the lodger franchise. We propose, then, to place lodgers—that is to say, persons who occupy rooms as inmates of another man's house—exactly on the same footing as those who hold what are called tenements or apartments. With respect to those occupying parts of houses, having separate ratings or separate landlords, we treat them as ratepaying householders, and bring them at once on the register by the agency of a public authority. Then as to men dwelling in apartments or lodgings, properly so called, for them the provision we make is simple, because if they can show that the rooms they inhabit are of the clear annual value of 10*l.*, without taking into consideration rates or taxes, then they will be entitled through a claim made from year to year to be placed on the register, the condition as to time being the same in all cases. In 1859 it was proposed by the late Government that any person paying 20*l.* by the year, or 8s. per week, for any rooms, whether furnished or unfurnished, should be entitled through yearly claims, subject to certain formalities, to be placed on the register. We think that there are insuperable difficulties to any franchise resting upon rent paid for furnished apartments. In the first place, the clear annual value of rooms is difficult to ascertain when the price continually fluctuates from day to day in town and country. Still it is a thing capable of being brought to some definite standard; but the value of the furniture, the rent paid on moveable commodities, would be a totally novel and, I must say, inconvenient basis for the franchise. (Hear, hear.) If the case is defective when you have to estimate the value of furniture alone, much more is it so when you come to consider the rent paid for furnished lodgings, because not only does it include the furniture, but many other particulars—personal service, firing, cooking, very commonly the use of the kitchen fire—in point of fact, creating a basis of a kind so peculiar that would be quite impossible to make use of it for the purpose. I hope the hon. gentleman will not think I am criticising his bill in a censorious spirit, because in point of fact I am not doing so more severely than I criticised our own bill of 1860, in respect to its unequal working between the metropolis and the country. I wish the House to understand, because great interest has been exhibited on the subject of the lodger franchise, that we propose to deal with it in a manner that will include every case, and more than every *bonâ fide* case which could have been included in the bill of 1859. If a man pays 20*l.* a year for his furnished lodging, then that lodging ought to be worth, allowing for the use of the furniture, more than 10*l.* clear annual value. We propose that any person paying rent of 10*l.* clear annual value, subject to the usual conditions of occupation and residence, shall be entitled to come on the register. I can give no information—and I believe the right hon. gentleman in 1859 could give no information—as to the number of persons who will be entitled to be registered as lodgers. My firm belief is that it will be a small one. The operation of claiming from year to year is one which must be very burdensome to the working man; but educated men, young men —

such as clerks in business, versed in the use of pen and ink, possessing intelligence and the inclination to obtain the franchise, and willing to take the trouble necessary, as I hope they will be, will constitute a middle class of extended franchise, though it would be to delude the House if I were to point to any large number of the working classes as likely to come on the register through this means. I do not, however, look to any large or considerable addition to the constituency from this source, and I consequently do not venture to name any figure as its probable amount; but I state 600,000 as the amount of the additional franchise that will be granted under the provisions of our measure.

I now come to the last and most important consideration, that of enfranchisement below this line. In the passage I read from the speech of Lord Russell in 1860, he adverted to the proposal of changing a 6*l.* rental franchise to a rated franchise of the same nominal amount. The question of a rated franchise has always been of the greatest interest to those engaged in the preparations of our too numerous Reform Bills. The advantage of having a fixed standard, not dependent simply on a basis which each man must renew for himself, but dependent upon the fiat of authority, has always seemed an attraction, it being the business of the public authority to fix the value of the holding for purposes which are not political. This was a reason which, but for the objection I will presently mention, would have led us to the adoption, not only of a rating franchise, but of the precise value indicated in the passage of his speech to which I have referred. The Small Tenements Act provides that, in all places where it is adopted—and gentlemen have seen for themselves that it is adopted in the great majority of the boroughs in this country—every tenant up to and including 6*l.* shall have the rates paid by the landlord. There would have been a very great advantage in saying we will adopt the precise limit at which Parliament has fixed the liability of paying direct local taxes. But when we came to look at the operation of the Act we found that the enfranchisement which would have been effected under it would not have exceeded 80,000 persons ; and we did not think that the placing such a number on the register by a bill to be proposed for the readjustment of the franchise would have entitled us to hold it up to Parliament or the country as likely to procure a settlement of the question. (Hear, hear.)

We were met by another question, the last of the drier subjects to which I shall have to call the attention of the House, but an important one—the great change, or reform, I should call it, which has been effected by my right hon. friend, the President of the Poor-law Board, through the medium of the Union Assessments Act. In former times it was said that the obvious plan was to fix on the same franchise as drawn from the rate-book, but the inequality of rating was so gross and monstrous in various parts of the country that, though we attempted it by the bill of 1854, yet it could not be expected to prove a sound basis for the franchise, The rating is now immensely improved, but it is our obvious duty to take the best and simplest basis for the franchise we can find. The question is whether we cannot obtain a basis for the franchise more nearly coinciding with actual fact than what is supplied by the rating. The clear annual value of a tenement appear

in this kingdom to be *prima facie* fixed by the rate-book, the rating being supposed to be a public standard impartially fixed for the purpose of local taxation. But in everything in which rating is good, the gross estimated rental is good also, and it avoids various sources of error, inequality, and injustice which are inherent in the rating. The rate is struck according to certain deductions made from the rental, and the rateable value contains no new or independent elements of appreciation which you do not get in the gross estimate of rental. The rateable value is not *per se* the proper test of its real value, because it is not the test of what the man pays for his tenement, but is only a test of the net value of that tenement to the landlord—a thing very important for the parish officers to know, but with which we as a Legislature have nothing to do. There may be two men occupying 10*l.* houses, one a very solid and substantial structure, so that the occupant will only require a deduction of six or eight per cent. for repairs, and the other a structure of slight materials and requiring much larger expenditure from year to year to keep it in repair, so that one would have the franchise and the other not. We do not therefore propose to alter the legal definition of the Reform Act; it it will still be clear annual value; but we distinctly and positively attach that legal definition to the rate-book, by saying that the gross estimate of rental in the rate-book shall be *prima facie* evidence, until contradicted, of the clear annual value.

Thus, if I have at all made myself intelligible to the House, we shall secure the double advantage of adhering to the present definition, and avoiding the inequalities of the rating, and attain a simplicity, certainty, and facility which could be attained by no other means. In all except thirty boroughs the gross estimated rental has been found to be exactly correspondent and equal to the rack rent. Of those thirty about one half exhibit considerable uncertainty, because the provisions of my right hon. friend's Act are not yet in complete operation, although they will be so before the bill I have now the honour to propose. If there be any other cases in which the gross estimated rental is not in accordance with the rate book, we shall provide for them by such enactments as may be necessary to simplify the system of voting. It is therefore with perfect confidence that we can recommend the gross estimated rental as a good basis for the franchise. In the meantime, while these inequalities exist, we have got the means of testing the thing by the income-tax returns. It ought to be known to the House that these income-tax returns represent a sum considerably above the rack rent, because in all cases of compound householders, and in every case where the landlord pays the rates *de facto*, and includes them in the rent, he pays income tax upon the rates as well as the rent. The state of figures is this :—The total valuation, 39,218,000*l.*, and the gross estimated rental, 37,375,000*l.*, the difference being 1,873,000*l.*, or 5 per cent. Consequently we have no hesitation whatever in feeling we have here got a secure basis of operations which will be the means of introducing a great practical improvement in the administration of the law. The present town constituencies consist of 488,000 persons, and dividing those above the line of working class and below, we have 126,000 below, and 362,000 who do not belong to the working class. We propose to add 60,000 to the

present number of 10*l.* voters, and I take all those as belonging to the working class. I do not take any as belonging to the lodging or savings bank class. Therefore, 60,000 and 126,000 would make 186,000 of the working class. 6*l.* rental, added to that 186,000, when subjected to the most careful investigation, and after making all allowances and all the additions that we think ought to be made with a view to exactitude, would give about 242,000. That would make a total of 428,000. and, in fact, place the working classes in a clear majority of the town constituencies. That has never been the intention of any bill proposed in this House. I do not think it is a proposal that Parliament would adopt. I cannot say I am convinced it would be attended with great danger. (Cheers.) I am sure however, it is not according to the view or expectation of Parliament; and although for my own part I do not think that much apprehension need be entertained with respect to it, yet this I fully admit, that upon general grounds of political prudence it is not well to make too sudden and extensive a change in the depositories of Parliament. (Hear, hear.) I do not think we are called upon, under the circumstances in which we stand, to give over a majority of the town constituencies by a decision now to be arrived at into the hands of the working classes. (Hear, hear.)

We propose then to take the figure next above that—7*l.* clear annual value. (Cheers and laughter.) I will give the house the exact result—exact as far as we can make it so—of 7*l.* clear annual value. If gentlemen will take pains to add together the gross total of middle occupiers at 7*l.* and under 10*l.*, if then they, with a rule-of-three sum, having for its first two terms the gross number of occupiers at 10*l.* and the present 10*l.* constituency, and for its third term the gross number of occupiers between 7*l.* and 10*l.*, the fourth term will give them the probable constituency upon reducing the franchise to 7*l.* (Laughter from the Opposition.) I am very glad to think that such a simple sum in arithmetic proves to be so amusing; it is generally supposed to belong to a drier class of subject. That fourth term would be 156,000. [A Voice: Net or gross?] That is net. The gross is 207,000 or 208,000. From that a deduction must be made for a certain portion of freemen. I take at one-third the enfranchised freemen—freemen now enjoying the franchise—who inhabit houses between 7*l.* and 10*l.* That leaves 144,000. It is right now to point out the causes by which this calculation might, in the view of different persons, be modified. There are some persons occupying houses between 10*l.* and 7*l.* rental who do not belong to the working class. The number of those, as far as our inquiries go, is very small. I believe that 5 per cent. would be an overstatement of it, and that it is needless to take it into view as a deduction. Then, again, some deduction might be made on account of the more frequent removals among the holders of small houses. (Hear, hear). But on the other hand, an increase would have to be made for the effect produced by the abolition of the ratepaying clauses. Our rule-of-three sum is plainly upon a basis which includes the operation of the ratepaying clauses. Also there would have to be an addition for the savings bank franchise. I do not myself attach any great consequence to any of those various modifying circumstances. I think they might be taken on the whole as balancing one

another, and I should say the addition made for the working class by a reduction to 7*l.* clear annual value would be 145,000 persons. Now, I wish to point out to those who may think this addition to the constituency ought not to take place, that all are disposed to admit that the franchise ought to be attainable by the working man. I think the most extreme speeches in this House in opposition to change have been always of this character. They had said it was desirable the working man should be enabled to reach the franchise. (Hear, hear.) 10*l.* clear annual value, when you make the proper addition for rates and for furniture, must mean that the house costs the man not less than 16*l.* I think I am safe, and speak with moderation when I say that the working man does not spend more than one-sixth of his income on his house. As well as we can gather it is one-sixth, therefore his income must be 96*l.*, or in other words, without making any allowance whatever for sickness and interruption of work, he must receive 1*l* 17s. a week, or, if we allow for necessary breaks, 2*l.* a week wages. But it is a small proportion of the working class that get 2*l.* a week wages; and I do not think therefore that the franchise can be said to be liberally and largely within the reaching of the working man at 10*l.* annual rental. The 7*l.* franchise will certainly work in a different manner. The net 7*l.*, allowing 60 per cent. for rates and furniture, would give a gross sum of 11*l.* 4s. That would represent 67*l.* 4s. But instead of thirty odd shillings a week, the wages of a man occupying such a house would be a little under 26s. a week. That sum is undoubtedly unattainable by the peasantry and by mere hand labour except in very rare circumstances. But it is generally attainable by artisans and skilled labourers.

I will now endeavour to give a general view of the figures of this case in order that it may be placed clearly before the House. In the counties as I have said, if our bill become law, the working class will have a smaller proportion of the whole constituency than they now have. In the towns the classes apart from the working class amount to the constituency of 302,000 persons, the working class to 126,000. There will be new members of the working classes above the line of 10*l.* amounting to 60,000 persons, and below the line 144,000, making the working class in the constituency 330,000, or a total addition of 204,000 to the 126,000 already included. Then as to the total enfranchisement contemplated both in towns and counties. In the counties the 14*l.* franchise will produce 172,000 more voters, to which is to be added whatever may be thought fit—it cannot be a large amount—franchises arising from copyholds, leaseholds, and savings in the banks. The total addition to the electoral roll will then be —so far as we venture to offer definite figures on the subject—376,000. With respect to the lodger franchise, the county leasehold and copyhold franchises, and the savings bank franchise, we should not be very far wrong in throwing in 24,000 to make the round number of persons enfranchised 400,000, one-half of whom will belong to the working class and the other half to the middle class. In the middle class no doubt there will be many possessing education, though not of great means. And now as to the proportion which the new constituencies would bear to householders. I reckon it would stand thus:—The town population is 9,326,000, the

number of adult males 2,331,000, the number of male occupiers 1.347,000, at and over the 7*l.* rent 847,000. The actual constituency of 488,000 represents 36 per cent. of the male occupiers. The proposed constituency of 692,000 would represent 37 per cent. of the male occupiers, and of the whole working class in towns there would be 330.000 enfranchised against 588,000 unenfranchised—in fact less than two in five, but more than one in three. The gross constituency of the whole country would stand thus:—(A Voice: "England and Wales?")England and Wales—550,000 for the counties, 514,000 for the towns. That would be 1,064,000. But very large deductions require to be made from that for those persons who possess a plurality of votes. I cannot think, even on a liberal estimate, that the present constituency consists of more than 900,000 persons. In addition to this it is proposed to bring in 400,000. That would make 1,300,000. The total adult males is 5,300,000, so that the number enfranchised in both country and town would be as nearly as possible one-fourth.

I do not know whether the House would wish me to recapitulate shortly the propositions. (Hear, hear.) First, then, an occupation franchise, including a house, beginning at 14*l.* rental and reaching up to 50*l.*, the present occupation franchise; second, to introduce into the counties a provision whereby a copyhold and leasehold interest within Parliamentary boroughs shall be put on the same footing as freeholds are placed within Parliamentary boroughs; the savings bank franchise, which shall operate both in counties and towns, but have a more important operation in counties. In towns to place the compound householders on a footing with the rating householders, and to abolish the tax and ratepaying clauses. To reduce the 10*l.* clear annual value to 7*l.* in boroughs, making *pro tanto* the rate-book the register, and to introduce a franchise both for those occupying part of a house with separate access and those who occupied as inmates of another man's house. We propose to abolish the necessity of registering voters if resident at the time of voting; and lastly—I say lastly because there are some other provisions with which I need not now trouble the House—we propose to follow an example set by the right hon. gentleman opposite under the Government of Lord Derby in 1859, and supported by many great authorities, by introducing a clause disabling from voting persons who are employed in the Government yards. (Cheers.)

I have detained the House very long in this explanation, and I have to consider what is the true representation to be made of such a plan as that which we submit. It certainly makes a large addition to the constituency. The number of persons who would be enfranchised by this bill, not vaguely estimated, but taken from the positive and absolute figures which we have been enabled to submit, independently of questionable items, would not certainly be a larger number than was enfeanchised by the Reform Act, for no estimate of the enfranchisement effected under the Reform Act would carry it beyond the number of 300,000 persons. As respects the county voting, I do not apprehend this measure will raise any question. As respects the borough votes we hope the proposal is a liberal one; and we feel that it will effect a moderate and safe enfranchisement. It does not give an absolute majority in town constituencies to the working classes.

It is probable that according to the various tempers of men's minds we shall be told that we have done too little, or that we have done too much. Our answer is that we have done our best. (Cheers.) We have endeavoured to take account of the state and condition of the country, as well as of the qualifications which the people possess for the exercise of the political franchise. We are mindful of the limbo of abortive creations which is filled, unfortunately, with the skeletons of Reform Bills. (Laughter) We do not wish to add to the number of these unfortunate measures. We may have erred, but we have endeavoured to see how much good, by the measure we propose, we had the prospect of effecting for the country. As to the completeness of the measure, I have given to the House what I think is a clear and distinct explanaiton. Even honesty of purpose compelled us, upon a careful examination of facts, not to attempt by any measure we could lay on the table that which we knew to be impracticable, and in which, therefore, we must fail.

If we are told that we should have done more, our answer is that it was our duty to take into view the sentiment of the country, disposed to moderate change but sensible of what it possesses, and sensitive with regard to what might involve hazard. Nor can we deny the constantly growing capacity and intelligenee of the working classes, or their admirable performance of at least their duties towards their superiors. Any sin which they have in addition to the sins which are common to us is a sin against themselves. (Hear, hear.) Yet it is true of the working classes, as it is true of other classes, that it is a dangerous temptation to them to be suddenly invested with a preponderating power; and that I think is the reason why we have done too little in enfranchising them. We may be told, on the other hand, that we have done too much. I hope that may not be so. I do not entirely abandon the expectation that even those who have proceeded almost on principle against extension of the franchise downwards yet may be disposed to aceept a measure which they do not wholly approve of if they think it offers a fair compromise and settlement, for a considerable period, of a great, an important, a complex, and difficult question. (Hear, hear.)

I would beg them to consider what value there is in an extension of the franchise for its own sake. Liberty is a thing which is good, not merely in its fruit, but which is good in itself. When we are told that things are managed more economically, and more effectually by foreign governments than by English legislation, our constant answer is that our affairs are managed freely. (Hear, hear.) In the discharge of political duties there is an immense power for the people both of discipline and education. (Cheers.) If the issue is taken adversely upon this bill I hope it will be taken directly. I trust that it will be taken upon the question whether there is or is not to be an enfranchisement downwards, if it is to be taken at all. (Cheers.) We have felt that to be essential to the charcter, the credit, and the usefulness, not merely of the Government, not merely of a party, but of this House, committed as Parliament has been with respect to the question of the representation of the people. We cannot conceive that this addition, considerable though it be, of the working classes to the

constituency of the country is fraught with any danger. (Hear, hear.) We cannot look upon it as a Trojan horse approaching the walls of the sacred city, and filled with armed men who are bent upon ruin, plunder, and conflagration. (Hear, hear.) We cannot join in comparing it to that monstrum infelix. We cannot say—

Scanda fatalis machina muros
Fæta armis, Mediæque minans illabitur urbi.

We believe these persons to whom we propose to extend the franchise ought rather to be welcomed as friends than dreaded as a hostile army. (Hear, hear.) We ask you to give them political privileges within what you consider to be the just limits of prudence and circumspection, and, having determined those limits, to give with an ungrudging hand. Consider what you can safely and justly afford to do in admitting new subjects and citizens within the pale of the Parliamentary Constitution, and, having so considered, do not do it as if you apprehended danger and misfortune. (Cheers.) Do it as if you were conferring a boon which will be felt and reciprocated in grateful attachment. Give to those persons new interests in the Constitution, and thus beget a new attachment to the Constitution, to the Throne, and to the laws under which they live. That after all will be more than your gold and your silver—more than your fleets and armies—it will be at once the strength, the glory, and the safety of the land. (Great cheering.) The right hon. gentleman concluded by moving for leave to bring in the bill.

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